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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a study that investigated the concerns of Canadian superintendents. In a three-round modified Delphi design, an inventory of educational concerns was mailed to all 105 chief superintendents in a western Canadian province. A total of 76 superintendents responded in round 1 and 87 responded in round 2. They identified 70 educational issues that concerned them. Their top priorities focused on the areas of declining financial resources and planning for the future. School violence, vandalism, and racism were among the issues that received low-priority ratings. Respondents assigned relatively low-priority ratings to teacher burnout and teacher-work overload, which indicates the potential for conflict with teachers. From these areas of concern, the following themes emerged: power and control, special interest groups, student welfare, personnel development, instruction, resource allocation, program delivery, and school security. Despite the large number of concerns facing them, the superintendents did not express feelings of hopelessness or extreme frustration. The high response rate (83 percent) may indicate that superintendents want to be involved in the professional dialogue. Two tables are included. The appendix contains a sample of the inventory. (LMI)

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A PROFILE OF THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENCY: ISSUES AND PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a recent study, conducted in western Canada, of the current educational concerns of 87 school superintendents. The study was conducted to inform stakeholders about educational trends and about the perceptions that superintendents have of their role. The superintendents studied identified 70 educational issues that are of concern to them. Their top priorities focused on the areas of declining financial resources and planning for the future. School violence, vandalism and racism were among the issues receiving low priority ratings. Potential for conflict with teachers is implicit in relatively low priority ratings for teacher burnout and teacher work overload. The results of the study were used as the basis for suggestions for future study of the superintendency.

Introduction

Researchers of educational organizations have paid insufficient attention to the position of chief executive officer (Cuban, 1984; Crowson, 1987), most often referred to in North America as the superintendent. Much of what has been reported attends to the behavior of superintendents (Duignan, 1980; McLeod, 1984; Pitner & Ogawa, 1981), to the competencies they should have (Campbell & Holdaway, 1970; Hoyle, 1989), and to their administrative functions (Follo & LaBay, 1992; Hickcox, 1974). These kinds of information are valuable, especially in conjunction with reports of the topical content of superintendents' work, which have been provided within an American context by Ornstein (1991), Katz (1988), and Mickler (1987), and in Canadian terms by Genge and Holdaway (1992) and Storey (1987).

However, as early as 1984 Cuban stated that additional study was needed of the role of the superintendent as it specifically related to school effectiveness, as measured by test scores, "self-esteem, higher-order thinking skills, and a sense of the aesthetic" (p. 132). Similar calls for study of the superintendency were made by Murphy, Hallinger, & Peterson (1985) and Wirt (1988). Later, Crowson and Morris (1991) predicted that school effectiveness would be enhanced by a "balanced system" (p. 85) in which both centralized and decentralized decision making were evident in the areas of risk-management, resource allocation, and pattern maintenance. As well, Corbett & Wilson (1992) argued that instructional improvement can result when central office personnel equalize student access to high quality educational programs and make staff development for teachers a priority.

An important development in the recent discussion of the superintendency was Leithwood's (1992) proposal of an integrative framework for future research. Within this framework, he suggested that external influences on superintendents interact with how they feel and think (i.e. their internal processes) and result in specific actions that are intended to foster school improvement. Leithwood (1992) implied that, although superintendents' actions are constrained by the "organizational distance" (p. 177) between them and their effects on students, positive student growth can be realized.

Purpose of the Study

Loucks-Horsley and Stiegelbauer (1991) contended that "organizations cannot change until the individuals within them change" (p. 18) and that attending to the concerns and frustrations of individuals is central to the success or failure of a change effort. Therefore, it is proposed here that efforts to help superintendents promote school improvement should be linked to superintendents' individual needs and concerns. This proposal is based on the assumption that superintendents and other educational stakeholders would be better able to work toward school improvement if they knew the educational priorities of superintendents and the themes among these priorities. Thus, the purpose of this study was to identify the current educational concerns of superintendents.

Context of the Study

Under the terms of Section 93 of the British North America Act of 1867, reaffirmed in the Constitution Act 1982, education in Canada is controlled by the governments of each of the provinces. The federal government is not involved in educational matters, with a few exceptions like some aspects of the education of the children of members of the Canadian Armed Forces, Indian children, and inmates of federal penitentiaries. Therefore, most educational policies are determined by elected representatives to the provincial legislatures. The premier of each province selects one of the elected Members of the Legislative Assembly to become minister of education. This minister is responsible for overseeing the province's education system and is assisted by civil servants employed by the department of education. Because each province is comprised of a very large area, ministers of education could not possibly administer educational programs without delegation of authority. Thus, provincial governments have formed smaller administrative units generically called school districts. More specific labels, such as public school district, Roman Catholic school district, school division, and county, are used to describe the various patterns of organizing Canadian school districts.

The following is a description of how school districts are governed within three western Canadian provinces that share a similar educational history. In particular, the role of school superintendents is discussed in relation to the day-to-day operation of school districts. The three provinces are Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, commonly referred to as the prairie

provinces. In Alberta a population of 2 545 553 inhabits a total of 661 185 square kilometers. Saskatchewan, with 651 900 square kilometers, supports a population of 988 928, while Manitoba has a population of 1 091 942 spread throughout its 649 947 square kilometers. The three provinces collectively cover almost 20 per cent of the total area of the country, 9 911 023 square kilometers (Canadian Almanac & Directory, 1994). Canada's westernmost province, British Columbia, has been excluded from the description because, although its education system shares many characteristics with the prairie provinces, its history, traditions, geography, and demographics are quite different from those of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

What follows is drawn in part from the work of Levin and Young (1994), Fast (1989, 1992), and Giles and Proudfoot (1990), which should be consulted by anyone wanting a more detailed description of school districts, the role of the school superintendent, and Canadian educational administration in general.

Each school district on the Canadian prairies is governed by a school board consisting of approximately seven to fifteen trustees who are elected for terms of two to three years by the adult population residing within the geographic boundaries of the school district. School boards exist at the discretion of the provincial minister of education and, although it rarely happens, the minister can disband a school board when there is clear evidence of mismanagement, impropriety, or loss of public confidence. School boards must work within the legal parameters established by the provincial government and are responsible for

the day-to-day administration of schools. It important to note that school trustees have no individual power or authority in educational matters; it is only the school board per se that can establish policy. Therefore, it is school boards that must officially hire and pay school personnel, ensure that students have access to transportation to schools, and see that physical facilities are provided and maintained. This mandate must be carried out within the constraints imposed by the two main sources of funding for school boards - grants from the provincial government and local property taxes. In addition, school boards employ professional staff to administer provincial and school board policies. The number of administrative personnel is determined by the size and population of the school district. The administrative staff is headed by a chief executive officer, currently referred to as superintendent, chief superintendent, or director of education. The term superintendent as it is used within this article should be considered synonymous to the terms chief superintendent and director of education.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, most school districts in the prairie provinces were very small and served farm families within a four or five mile radius of a single school. These schools were supervised by government-appointed school inspectors who were each responsible for a collection of schools usually spread over a large geographical area. Locally-hired school superintendents existed as early as 1885 in Manitoba but it was not until the decades of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s that most school districts began to hire their own superintendents to administer educational programs. These same decades saw a gradual

consolidation of small school districts into fewer large ones, partly as a result of improved transportation capabilities and a desire to increase the program offerings to students. In fact, consolidation of school districts in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba is a process that is still underway.

One consequence of school district consolidation and locally-appointed superintendents is that superintendents' allegiance has been transferred from the government to their employing school boards. Even though school boards can dismiss superintendents, this is an infrequent occurrence and most superintendents in the prairie provinces serve their school districts for many years. This is not to say that school board-superintendent relations are always congenial. To the contrary, there is often an ongoing tension between the two parties with school trustees feeling that superintendents are insensitive to public opinion and superintendents concerned with trustees' lack of knowledge about educational matters.

The profile of the typical superintendent in each of the Canadian prairies is remarkably consistent. The position almost always is filled by a man of about fifty years of age. He has been, on average, a superintendent for nine years. Nearly all superintendents hold at least a master's degree in education. About eight per cent of superintendents in Saskatchewan and Manitoba have earned doctorates in education compared to approximately twenty per cent of Alberta superintendents with doctoral degrees. Virtually all superintendents have been teachers and principals prior to their appointment to the superintendency. Also, most have occupied other central office

administrative positions with titles like deputy superintendent, assistant superintendent, associate superintendent, area superintendent, and assistant director. However, a small number of mainly rural superintendents have worked their way through positions of increasing authority within the provincial departments of education prior to assuming a superintendent's position. A few other rural superintendents have moved directly from a principalship to the superintendency.

Superintendents are charged with a variety of leadership responsibilities that are both extensive and complex. A major responsibility is that of curriculum leader. Superintendents must ensure that provincially mandated curricula, which comprise the majority of school programs, and locally-approved curricula are understood and implemented by teachers and principals. This means that superintendents must maintain a reasonable level of knowledge about curriculum theory, instructional innovations, and change theory. Moreover, superintendents must see that teachers and principals have sufficient access to professional development to enable them to perform their duties well and that instructional programs and personnel are evaluated regularly.

School boards rely on superintendents to advise them in several important areas. For example, superintendents must help their school boards develop school district policies that anticipate an uncertain educational future. As well, superintendents must keep their school boards cognizant of corporate law, labor law, and legal liability issues that impact on their decisions. Also, they must see that educational programs are supported by adequate physical facilities, finances, and human

resources. Further, organizational concerns like busing of students, closure of small schools, and the opening and closing dates for each academic year all must be overseen by superintendents. These tasks are in addition to major personnel responsibilities such as contract negotiations with professional and support staff, defining working conditions for the same groups, arranging for teacher preparation time, and deploying teaching staff to meet changing school needs.

Budget issues are of paramount importance to superintendents due in part to real declines in educational funding resulting from recessionary and political factors over the past ten years. Another reason budget issues are important is that superintendents are responsible for operating what are essentially large public corporations with multi-million dollar budgets. Certainly superintendents are supported in their budgetary responsibilities by accounting personnel but the fact remains that superintendents must have a working understanding of the fundamentals of accounting, insurance costs, inventory and purchasing procedures, property taxation, payroll obligations, and government grant policies.

Recent trends within the prairie provinces highlight the political nature of the superintendency. For example, legislation just passed by the Alberta government will allow department of education staff to approve the hiring of superintendents by school boards and to restrict superintendents to three year, albeit renewable, contracts. As well, the prairie provinces are becoming increasingly urbanized which means that rural superintendents must cope, for example, with the closure of small schools which usually

is opposed vigorously by residents of rural communities. Conversely, urban superintendents are faced with growing numbers of students in newer suburbs but declining student populations in inner city neighborhoods. This urban phenomenon has occurred when the dearth of educational funds preclude the building of suburban schools and many parents are opposed to their children being transported to older parts of cities where school space might be available. These rural and urban factors indicate that there will be an ongoing demand for superintendents who are astute politicians.

Nature of the Study

This was an exploratory study designed in part to provide the basis for further study of superintendents' roles in school improvement. As well, the perceptions of superintendents were sought as part of a larger research program designed to identify and compare the educational concerns of teachers, school board members, superintendents, and principals (Webber, 1993, 1994). The study was based on a modified Delphi design, adapted from that described by Orlich (1989) and addressed the question "What are the educational issues that superintendents are currently addressing in their work?" The three-round study was conducted by mail with a subject pool of 105 chief superintendents, the total population of chief school superintendents in a western Canadian province. The study was restricted to three rounds because the intent was to identify the current educational concerns of superintendents and not to reach consensus, which is the more

usual intent of a Delphi survey (Curriculum Branch of the Victoria Department of Education, 1985; Chaney, 1989). The first round was necessary to identify the issues that concerned superintendents, the second round allowed respondents to rate the importance of each of the issues, and the third round was an opportunity to provide superintendents with a priorized summary of their collective concerns. In Round One, all subjects had been promised a summary of the study findings in an effort to maximize the response rate.

In Round One of the study, 76 of the 105 superintendents responded anonymously to this sentence stem: "When I think about the major educational issues I am presently encountering, I am mainly concerned about ..." Demographic data were not collected in Round One.

In Round Two, the responses to the sentence stem were used to construct a 70-item questionnaire, "The Superintendent Concern Inventory" (See Appendix). Then, 87 of the 105 superintendents indicated, on a five point scale ranging from "no importance" to "extremely important," how important each of the 70 issues was to them. These subjects also provided relevant demographic data.

An internal consistency reliability estimate, Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951), was computed for "The Superintendent Concern Inventory." Based on 81 cases, the derived reliability estimate for the scale equaled 0.91 (70 items), satisfactory for research purposes (Thorndike, 1982).

In Round Three, all of the 105 superintendents in the subject pool were mailed a summary of the results of "The Superintendent Concern Inventory."

Respondents

Nearly all (95%) of the 87 respondents to "The Superintendent Concern Inventory" were men, which reflects accurately the gender composition of the superintendency in western Canada. Well over a quarter (29%) of the superintendents had fewer than 5 years of experience in their position, while over a third (37%) had between 5 and 10 years of experience. The more senior superintendents, with 11 to 27 years of experience, made up 34% of the respondents. Twenty-four per cent of the superintendents represented very small school jurisdictions with fewer than 1000 students, while over one half (60%) of the respondents were from small- and medium-sized (1 000 to 4 600 students) school systems. Large (5 000 to 12 000 students) and very large (30 000 to 95 000 students) school jurisdictions were represented respectively by 10% and 6% of the superintendents. A large majority (75%) of superintendents had achieved a master's degree and 22% possessed earned doctoral degrees. Only one superintendent had just an undergraduate degree and two did not list their level of education. The superintendents ranged in age from 31 to 65 years, with an average of 50 years.

Results

The results of "The Superintendent Concern Inventory" are given in two categories that reflect the focuses of the study. Presented first are the educational concerns, in order of

priority, of superintendents. This is followed by a description of the themes among those priorities.

Priorities

The means of the items included in "The Superintendent Concern Inventory" are summarized in Table 1. They depict how important superintendents thought each issue was to them. Table 1 presents the issues in the order of highest to lowest mean value.

The top 10 issues are related to: (1) inadequate educational funding, (2) coping with funding decreases, and (3) support for education. The first category, inadequate funding, is comprised of concerns about appropriate levels of funding, financial equity among school jurisdictions, and staff salary expectations. Even the issue of educational leadership by the provincial government is directly related to funding because a major source of money for school systems in western Canada is the elected provincial government. The second category of coping with budget decreases reflects superintendents' efforts to design new ways, including the use of new technologies, of delivering educational programs. Support for education, the third category of concerns, represents efforts by superintendents to provide stability to their school systems through adequate planning, public relations, and staff development.

Items 11 through 20 provide evidence of a strong superintendent allegiance to students. This can be perceived in the concerns about students with dysfunctional families, behavior and social problems, and special learning needs. As well,

concerns 11 through 20 reveal a focus on role relationships with others such as school board members and principals.

Items 21 through 31 contain concerns that continue to reflect superintendents' loyalty to students. However, concerns associated with power and control also emerge. This is shown in the attention given to the strength of the teachers' association, change mandates from the provincial department of education, expectations of the public, parental involvement, and interagency cooperation.

The rest of the items contained in "The Superintendent Concern Inventory" are more scattered and clear hierarchical patterns failed to emerge. However, some of the individual rankings are significant. For example, relatively low superintendent concern over teacher burnout and teacher work overload, with ranks of 49 and 50 respectively, are similar to a lack of concern with these matters described in a separate study of school board members (Webber, 1993). This is in direct contrast to the views of western Canadian principals (Webber, 1994) and teachers (Alberta Teachers' Association, 1993), who both have expressed, in extremely strong terms, their concerns about teacher work overload.

It is also significant that superintendents gave very low rankings to the concerns of racism, school violence, and school vandalism. Their lack of concern with these issues is shared by principals (Webber, 1994). However, school board members are very concerned about issues of this sort (Webber, 1993). This wide discrepancy between the views of educational administrators and of representatives of the public might be due to media attention that

is disproportionate to the actual occurrence of racism, violence, and vandalism in schools.

Overall, superintendents in the present study identified many more educational concerns (70 issues) than did principals (38 issues) and school board members (46 issues) in earlier studies (Webber, 1993, 1994). This may be simply due to the scope of the superintendency which is wider than the roles of principals and school board members. It may also be indicative of the wide-ranging and highly political nature of superintendents' work, characteristics which have been widely recognized (Cunningham, 1985; Isherwood, Falconer, Lavery, McConaghy, & Klotz, 1984; Murphy, 1991; Washington, 1989). Interestingly, increasing politicization of the role of chief executive officer of an educational organization has been reported on an international level by Wirt (1988), in relation to the "state director-general in Australia, the director of education in the United Kingdom, and the district superintendent in the United States" (p. 41).

Insert Table 1 here.

Themes

The 70 items included in "The Superintendent Concern Inventory" were sorted into groups of related issues. This was done through a process of content analysis that was adapted from Agar's (1980) suggestions for analyzing the content of informal

Table 1

Mean Ratings of Importance for Superintendents' Concerns

Issue	Rank	Mean	SD
Appropriate provincial funding	1	4.44	0.88
Funding equity	2	4.24	0.99
Ed. leadership by provincial govt.	3	4.22	0.93
Planning for the future	4	4.13	0.87
Staff salary expectations	5	4.04	0.86
Building community support	6.5	4.00	0.77
Role of technology in education	6.5	4.00	0.83
Declining resources	8.5	3.99	1.08
Alternative ed. delivery models	8.5	3.99	0.83
Staff development	10	3.94	0.87
Students w/ dysfunctional families	11.5	3.93	0.85
Managing change	11.5	3.93	0.79
Local taxation	13	3.86	0.89
Students with behavior problems	14.5	3.85	0.82
Principals as instructional leaders	14.5	3.85	0.91
Quality of school board members	16.5	3.78	1.00
Student learning styles	16.5	3.78	0.88
Needs of non-academic students	18	3.77	0.74
Students with social problems	19	3.76	0.86
Special needs students	20	3.72	0.84
Strength of the Teachers' Assoc.	21	3.71	1.18
Unrealistic public expectations	22	3.67	1.07
Interagency cooperation	23	3.66	0.90
Dept. of Education change mandates	24.5	3.59	0.83
Effects of mainstreaming	24.5	3.59	0.90
Program continuity	26	3.58	1.01
Redefining education	27	3.56	0.86
Appropriate parental involvement	28.5	3.55	0.80
Student dropouts	28.5	3.55	1.01
Student motivation	30.5	3.54	0.83
Student job skills	30.5	3.54	0.75
Child abuse	32	3.52	0.96
Politicization of education	33	3.51	0.99
Educational accountability	34	3.50	0.85
Continuous student progress	35	3.49	0.94
Role of the school board	36	3.47	0.93
Staff and program cuts	37	3.46	1.14
Teacher education at universities	38	3.42	0.99
Applying research to teaching	39	3.40	0.99
Long-term teachers resisting change	40	3.38	1.16
Quality of superintendents	41	3.35	1.20
Teachers becoming social workers	42	3.25	1.10
Erosion of Judeo-Christian values	43	3.24	1.16
Total quality management	44	3.23	1.08
Inservice for trustees	45	3.22	1.05
School-based management	46	3.18	1.10

(table continues)

Table 1 (continued)

Mean Ratings of Importance for Superintendents' Concerns

Issue	Rank	Mean	SD
Effects of court decisions on ed.	47	3.16	1.00
Home schooling	48	3.15	1.19
Teacher burnout	49	3.07	0.98
Teacher work overload	50	3.02	0.89
Overemphasis on accountability	51	3.00	0.88
Materials duplication across grades	52	2.99	0.91
Student jobs outside school	53.5	2.90	0.92
Special interest group lobbying	53.5	2.90	0.97
Stress on students	55	2.84	0.81
Role of paraprofessionals	56	2.79	0.88
Coord. public & postsecondary prog.	57	2.72	1.01
Tchg. students to interpret media	58	2.69	0.98
Declining enrolments	59	2.63	1.27
Misuse of achievement test results	60	2.57	1.02
Lengthening the school day	61	2.51	1.03
Racism	62	2.49	1.11
Teaching of phonics	63	2.45	0.88
Multicultural issues	64	2.40	0.91
School violence	65	2.37	0.89
School vandalism	66	2.35	0.87
School entrance age	67	2.21	1.06
Francophone education	68	2.20	1.26
A negative post-strike atmosphere	69	2.14	1.20
School facilities sitting idle	70	2.01	0.99

interviews. That is, groups of superintendent concerns were based on the relatedness of the issues rather than from an imposed set of categories. Relatedness was defined as those "concepts" (Borg & Gall, 1979, p. 392) that shared a common set of attributes. Therefore, the eight categories presented in Table 2 were the result of an iterative process of reading the issues, sorting them, rethinking, and regrouping.

The theme containing the largest number of concerns was that of "power and control." Students were the only major stakeholder group that was not included in this theme, although Levin (1994) suggested that policy makers and practitioners should consult regularly with students. However, the provincial government, its department of education, the teachers' association, parents, the judiciary, school boards, and community members all were mentioned in relation to the "power and control" theme.

The second theme was "special interests" and the concerns it contained could have been considered reasonable components of the "power and control" group of superintendent concerns. However, the "power and control" theme contained references to the stakeholder groups that usually are considered to be the traditional players in school governance. Contrary to this, the "special interests" theme alluded to less dominant groups, such as cultural minorities, members of specific religions, and parents who teach their children at home.

"Student welfare" was a major theme among the items included in "The Superintendent Concern Inventory." Superintendents identified a wide variety of specific student characteristics and societal influences that have direct implications for students'

academic welfare.

As might be expected, a prominent theme was "personnel development." Superintendents were concerned about the knowledge and skill development of personnel in several key positions, including their own. These positions were those of school board members, superintendents, both beginning and experienced teachers, principals, and paraprofessionals.

Implicit in the "instructional concerns" theme is superintendents' interest in what is taught in classrooms and how that material is taught. Superintendents expressed interest in students' developmental readiness for formal instruction, the impact that the integration of students with special needs has on instruction, language arts instruction, subject integration (program continuity), student assessment, and the application of research on good teaching practices.

The "resource allocation" theme contained fewer items than some of the other themes, but it included some of superintendents' highest priorities. For example, appropriate provincial government funding and financial equality among school jurisdictions were the top two concerns of superintendents. Also, staff salary expectations and declining resources were among the highest eight priorities of superintendents. Local taxation was included in this theme because the only major source of money for school jurisdictions in western Canada, besides grants from the province, is property taxes. Concern about declining enrolments, primarily in rural areas, fit into the "resource allocation" theme because provincial grants to school jurisdictions are on a per student basis; therefore, a reduction in student population is

accompanied by lower provincial grants. Concern about how well school facilities are used is a mainly urban phenomenon, where the pace of school construction in newer suburbs has not matched increases in student populations. Instead, students in newer suburbs are bused to neighborhoods closer to the city centers, where student numbers have declined.

Declining financial resources, which recently culminated in an overall provincial budget reduction of $239 million over three years (Welch, 1994), have caused superintendents to seek ways to deliver educational programs more cheaply. This is reflected in the "program delivery" theme which contains a variety of suggestions for teaching students at a reduced cost. It is significant that these suggestions appear to be motivated by financial rather than pedagogical reasons. Concerns about planning for the future and managing change could have been included logically in the "power and control" theme. However, they were included in the "program delivery" theme because all of the suggested variations in instructional format involve a clear need for planning and change management.

The last theme presented in Table 2 is "school security." This small category contains concerns that were extremely low priorities for superintendents. Although the violence that has occurred in Canadian schools has been very serious on occasion, the low level of concern that superintendents have about racism, vandalism, and violence raise questions about how much, or if, the influence of the media and "myth" (Males, 1992, p.54) have caused the levels of violence and misbehavior to be overestimated.

Table 2
Themes Among Superintendents' Concerns

Themes	Concerns
Power and control	Educational leadership of provincial govt.
	Department of Education change mandates
	Strength of the Teachers' Association
	Appropriate parental involvement
	Unrealistic public expectations
	Politicization of education
	Effects of court decisions on education
	Role of the school board
	Building community support
	Negative post-strike atmosphere
	Total quality management
	School-based management
	Overemphasis on accountability
	Educational accountability
Special interests	Multicultural issues
	Francophone education
	Special interest group lobbying
	Erosion of Judeo-Christian values
	Home schooling
Student welfare	Students with behavior problems
	Special needs students
	Students with social problems
	Needs of non-academic students
	Student learning styles
	Student jobs outside school
	Stress on students
	Child abuse
	Student job skills
	Student motivation
	Student dropouts
	Students with dysfunctional families
Personnel Development	Inservice for school board members
	Teacher education at universities
	Quality of school board members
	Quality of superintendents
	Teachers becoming social workers
	Teacher work overload
	Teacher burnout
	Long-term teachers resisting change
	Principals as instructional leaders
	Role of paraprofessionals
	Staff development

(table continues)

Table 2 (continued)
Themes Among Superintendents' Concerns

Themes	Concerns
Instructional concerns	School entrance age
	Effects of mainstreaming
	Teaching of phonics
	Teaching students to interpret media
	Program continuity
	Continuous student progress
	Materials duplication across grades
	Applying research to teaching
	Misuse of achievement test results
Resource allocation	Staff and program cuts
	Local taxation
	Declining resources
	Staff salary expectations
	Funding equity
	Appropriate provincial funding
	School facilities sitting idle
	Declining enrolment
Program delivery	Coordinating public & postsecondary programs
	Interagency cooperation
	Alternative educational delivery models
	Role of technology in education
	Planning for the future
	Redefining education
	Lengthening the school day
	Managing change
School security	Racism
	School vandalism
	School violence

Insert Table 2 here.

Discussion

Several cautions must be noted in relation to the results of this study of the superintendency. First, the data were subject to respondents' biases and memories. As well, the results of the study should be ascribed to the general perceptions of superintendents representing many different school districts rather than to particular settings or individuals. Also, the findings of this study are time-specific and the perceptions of western Canadian superintendents are sure to evolve as events, personnel, and conditions change. Within the parameters of these limitations, some tentative interpretations can be drawn from the study findings.

Leithwood (1992, p. 179) used the term "interpretation" to describe the understanding that superintendents have of problem(s) that need to be addressed in a context that may contain many problems. The results of the current study suggest that superintendents interpret the problems that are in most need of their attention to be in three areas. The first, inadequate funding, is of very high concern to superintendents. This is consistent with the usual view of the responsibilities of chief executive officers in school jurisdictions (Crowson & Morris, 1991) and current economic conditions in western Canada are likely to cause superintendents to emphasize their financial

responsibilities. The second problem area highlighted by superintendents was coping with funding decreases. This area is directly related to the first, inadequate funding, and it includes a variety of ways that superintendents have tried or would like to try adapting to economic demands. For example, superintendents focused on a positive approach to new financial conditions and planning for the future. Further, they looked to technology for assistance in the coping process. Also, they indicated a willingness to consider educational delivery models that vary from traditional ones. The third problem area was garnering support for education. This included seeking the support of community members, a phenomenon which corroborates Campbell-Evans' (1993) observation that education is entering a more competitive context in which "many parents will shop to find a school community which shares or accommodates their view of educational priorities" (p. 111). In addition, superintendents indicated that staff development was a priority, which suggests that McLaughlin's (1991) belief that staff development has become a "taken-for-granted component of almost all education reform initiatives" (p. 61) may be true, at least for superintendents. However, superintendents may face difficulties in convincing school board members of the importance of staff development (Webber, 1993).

These three areas of priority indicate that superintendents wish to adjust to their present economic contexts in proactive ways. They want to do this while achieving a balance between maintaining community support and supporting teachers in initiatives designed to provide a reasonable quality of instruction to students. Superintendents also wish to support

students, especially those with special needs, and to build strong, productive relationships with principals and school board members.

Inherent in superintendents' desire to be proactive and establish a stable financial context is a high value placed on control and predictability. This proposal is supported by the large number of concerns included in the "power and control" theme presented in Table 2. It is reasonable to argue that the valuing of control and predictability should accompany the strong locus of control that superintendents must have if they are to believe that they can make a difference in their school jurisdictions. In fact, it is perhaps because of a strong locus of control that superintendents are not sympathetic to the issues of teacher burnout and teacher work overload.

The high number of concerns expressed about student welfare and the strong importance ratings that these issues received indicate that superintendents feel a strong loyalty to students, especially those who are disadvantaged. When the loyalty superintendents feel toward students is compared to the relatively low concern superintendents have for teacher burnout and teacher work overload, it seems that superintendents may see students as somehow more important than teachers. This may prove to be problematic as superintendents seek to introduce new models of program delivery, especially in view of the political dimension of the superintendency and in light of Dimmock's (1993) statement that "the involvement of school personnel in key stages of the politically driven initiative has typically been minimal" (p. 2).

The variety of ways that superintendents can respond to

problems is restricted by any number of factors. These factors include the restrictions superintendents are aware of, plus the restrictions imposed by possible lack of awareness of how they are influenced. The superintendents in the present study are conscious of the constraints imposed by the limited financial resources at their disposal. This limits the level of staff development that they can support, the amount of community satisfaction that can be achieved, and the degree to which they can accommodate students with special needs. Superintendents also are conscious of how they must operate within the parameters of school board support. It is also clear from this study that superintendents are very conscious of a multitude of "community," school "board," and school "system" (Allison, 1989, p. 297) issues. However, it is not clear that superintendents are sympathetic toward the views of other stakeholders like school board members (Webber, 1993), principals (Webber, 1994), and teachers (Alberta Teachers' Association, 1993). While it is neither necessary nor desirable for the views of all stakeholders to be totally consistent, the willingness of teachers, for example, to work hard and implement change initiatives is dependent to a large extent upon "the support and interest of central office staff" (McLaughlin, 1991, p. 66).

There was no evidence in the style or tone of the written commentary gathered during Round One of the study to indicate that superintendents had a general feeling of hopelessness or extreme frustration, despite the large number of concerns facing them. This supports Storey's (1987) belief that a perception of superintendents as "victims of enormous pressure" (p. 32) would be

in error. To the contrary, superintendents seemed to have primarily role-appropriate concerns. In fact, the strong response rate (83%) to "The Superintendent Concern Inventory" may be interpreted as evidence that superintendents were genuinely open with their views and interested in staying involved in professional dialogue.

Suggestions for Future Research

The present study has highlighted several areas of research into the superintendency that may prove beneficial. They include:

* Do the administrative concerns of superintendents who are women differ from those who are men?

* What are the specific problem-solving processes employed by superintendents in response to their interpretations of problems? Further to this, what influence does political astuteness and charisma, as observed by Webber and Skau (1993), have on the success of problem-solving processes? Also, are there discernible patterns in the problem-solving processes utilized by superintendents with widely varying levels of success?

* Do the world views of teachers, principals, and school board members in other contexts also contrast with those of superintendents? If so, then how and why do these contrasts occur?

* What are the implications of superintendents having relatively little concern for teacher burnout and teacher work overload? Is this a perspective held by superintendents in other contexts? Which factors contribute to this phenomenon?

* Why do superintendents perceive school security issues as relatively unimportant? What is the actual incidence of racism, school violence, and school vandalism compared to other eras and other school jurisdictions? What are viable working definitions for various school security issues?

Conclusion

The complexity and scope of the concerns of the superintendents in this study make it apparent that the successful promotion of school effectiveness is dependent upon more than the superintendency. Ongoing dialogue and consensus building among all stakeholders are basic requirements. If those processes are to be successful, they must be based upon an openness to innovation and to the world views of others. Achieving that openness remains the challenge of all those committed to addressing the educational concerns highlighted in this study.

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APPENDIX

THE SUPERINTENDENT CONCERN INVENTORY

A. Please respond to the following demographic questions. The information will be used to see if there are statistically significant differences in the views of specific groups of school superintendents. **Please note that you are responding anonymously.**

1. Your school jurisdiction is a

___ public school district

___ Catholic separate school district

___ Protestant separate school district

___ county system

___ school division

___ other (Please specify _____)

2. Number of years as a school superintendent _____

3. Approximate number of students in your jurisdiction _____

4. Please indicate your highest level of formal education _____
(e.g. bachelor's degree, graduate diploma, master's degree, doctoral degree, etc.)

5. Your age _____

6. You are ____ male ____ female

B. How important are the following randomly ordered educational issues <u>TO YOU PRESENTLY</u>?

Please circle the appropriate number for each item, using the scale below.

NO IMPORTANCE **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** **EXTREMELY IMPORTANT**

Student learning styles	1	2	3	4	5	School vandalism	1	2	3	4	5
Unrealistic public expectations	1	2	3	4	5	Effects of court decisions on education	1	2	3	4	5
Child abuse	1	2	3	4	5	Teacher burnout	1	2	3	4	5
Quality of school trustees	1	2	3	4	5	Quality of superintendents	1	2	3	4	5
Student job skills	1	2	3	4	5	Students with behavior problems	1	2	3	4	5
Duplication of materials across grades	1	2	3	4	5	Redefining education	1	2	3	4	5
Educational leadership by prov. government	1	2	3	4	5	Educational accountability	1	2	3	4	5
Role of technology in education	1	2	3	4	5	Funding equity	1	2	3	4	5
Effects of mainstreaming	1	2	3	4	5	Student jobs outside school	1	2	3	4	5
Building community support	1	2	3	4	5	School facilities sitting idle	1	2	3	4	5
Teaching of phonics	1	2	3	4	5	Special needs students	1	2	3	4	5
Student dropouts	1	2	3	4	5	Overemphasis on accountability	1	2	3	4	5
Declining enrolments	1	2	3	4	5	Declining resources	1	2	3	4	5
Students from dysfunctional families	1	2	3	4	5	Staff salary expectations	1	2	3	4	5
Alternative educational delivery models	1	2	3	4	5	Interagency cooperation	1	2	3	4	5
Misuse of achievement test results	1	2	3	4	5	Teacher education programs at universities	1	2	3	4	5
Appropriate provincial funding	1	2	3	4	5	Dept. of ed. change mandates	1	2	3	4	5
Erosion of Judeo-Christian moral values	1	2	3	4	5	Planning for the future	1	2	3	4	5

B. **(Continued)** How important are the following randomly ordered educational issues TO YOU PRESENTLY?

Please circle the appropriate number for each item, using the scale below.

NO IMPORTANCE **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** **EXTREMELY IMPORTANT**

Staff development	1	2	3	4	5	Teaching students to interpret media	1	2	3	4	5
Local taxation	1	2	3	4	5	Francophone education	1	2	3	4	5
Managing change	1	2	3	4	5	Racism	1	2	3	4	5
Appropriate parental involvement	1	2	3	4	5	Stress on students	1	2	3	4	5
School violence	1	2	3	4	5	Continuous student progress	1	2	3	4	5
Special interest group lobbying	1	2	3	4	5	Role of the school board	1	2	3	4	5
School-based management	1	2	3	4	5	Teacher work overload	1	2	3	4	5
Lengthening the school day	1	2	3	4	5	Politicization of education	1	2	3	4	5
Strength of the teachers' association	1	2	3	4	5	Applying research findings to teaching	1	2	3	4	5
Program continuity	1	2	3	4	5	Staff and program cuts	1	2	3	4	5
Facing a negative post-strike atmosphere	1	2	3	4	5	Student motivation	1	2	3	4	5
Role of paraprofessionals	1	2	3	4	5	Needs of non-academic students	1	2	3	4	5
Total Quality Management	1	2	3	4	5	Students with social problems	1	2	3	4	5
Coordinating public & postsecondary programs	1	2	3	4	5	Principals as instructional leaders	1	2	3	4	5
Inservice for trustees	1	2	3	4	5	School entrance age	1	2	3	4	5
Home schooling	1	2	3	4	5	Long-term teachers resisting change	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers becoming social workers	1	2	3	4	5	Multicultural issues	1	2	3	4	5